

CHONDRODACTYLUS WEIRI, sp. nov.

Distinguished from its ally in the following points:—Tubercles on the supraorbital edge scarcely enlarged, separated from those on the other side by three series of tubercles in the middle; the width of the interorbital space equals quite one half of the vertical diameter of the orbit. Enlarged dorsal tubercles larger, more strongly keeled, subtriangular. Ventral scales much larger; 6 or 7, on the middle of the belly, correspond to the horizontal diameter of the eye (instead of 11 or 12 in *C. angulifer*). Coloration very similar to that of the adult *C. angulifer*, i. e. with a blackish crescentic band, concavity forwards, extending from shoulder to shoulder, and pairs of round whitish spots on the back. The unique specimen measures 95 millim., in which the tail enters for 40.

April 5, 1887.

Prof. W. H. Flower, LL.D., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

The Secretary read the following report on the additions to the Society's Menagerie during the month of March 1887:—

The total number of registered additions to the Society's Menagerie during the month of March was 76. Of these 22 were by birth, 43 by presentation, 6 by purchase, 1 by exchange, and 4 were received on deposit. The total number of departures during the same period, by death and removals, was 94.

The most noticeable additions during the month were:—

1. Two Long-tailed Grass-Finches (*Poëphila acuticauda*), from Derby, King Sound, N.W. Australia, presented to the Collection by Mr. Walter Burton, F.Z.S., March 18. These are the first examples of this elegant little Grass-Finch which have been received by the Society.

2. A Fisk's Snake (*Lamprophis fiskii*) and a Narrow-headed Toad (*Bufo angusticeps*), from South Africa, presented to the Society by the Rev. G. H. R. Fisk, and received 24th March. Both of these are new to the Society's Collection, and Fisk's Snake, being new to science, has been named by Mr. Boulenger after its donor.

I also wish to call attention to the fact that Sir Walter Buller has presented to the Society the female Huia-bird (*Heteralocha gouldi*) which he deposited in the Society's Gardens on the 22nd April last year, and that he hopes to be able to obtain for us a companion of the male sex. The female bird in the Gardens is now in good health and condition.

The following extracts were read from a letter addressed to the Secretary by the Rev. Geo. H. R. Fisk, C.M.Z.S., dated Capetown, March 9, 1887:—

“The annexed anecdote of a Mouse¹ and a Ringhals Snake (*Sepedon*

¹ [In a subsequent letter Mr. Fisk states that the Mouse was believed to be a specimen of *Dendromys melanotis*.—P. L. S.]

hæmachates) was written for me at my request by my friend Mr. Sydney Cowper, who, you may remember, was the Cape representative at the late Colonial and Indian Exhibition. His name is guarantee of strict accuracy.

“I send you a copy of his writing, thinking it may be interesting, showing as it does a way in which perhaps many young snakes are destroyed. Were not an immense number of the eggs and of the young of snakes destroyed by their natural enemies, their number would soon in some parts become so great as to be very inconvenient indeed to other animals and to man also.

“I have long known that cats kill snakes. I have seen a lizard kill a snake. You will remember a snake which I sent to your Society which had devoured the eggs laid by another snake, and now we have an instance of a Mouse killing and eating a young venomous snake.

“Probably there are many other ways in which great numbers are destroyed before they reach an age and size when they become very dangerous.

“On Saturday the 19th February my friend Mr. W. Holms and I managed to secure on Wynberg flats, without injury to the specimens, two young ‘Ringhals,’ probably from 7 to 14 days old, measuring the one some 10 inches and the other 9 inches in length. We brought them home in our handkerchiefs, placed them in a bandbox, and proceeded to find food for them. A tour round the garden (Rokey, Wynberg) produced one tortoise, one toad, one field-mouse, one cricket, two spiders, and some gentles. These, excepting the toad, were all placed in the bandbox with the two snakes, and we expected to find the snakes in good condition the following morning.

“On looking into the box next morning I found but three survivors of the previous night, namely the *tortoise*, the *mouse*, and one ‘*Ringhals*.’ The mouse had evidently had the best of it, for he was devouring the remains of one of the snakes, and, judging by the distention of his little abdomen, I think he must also have consumed the cricket, spiders, and gentles. I watched the survivors attentively during Sunday, and saw the mouse make an onslaught on the remaining *Ringhals*. He fastened on the snake’s back with his tiny sharp claws and pecked away with his teeth, the snake trying its utmost to wriggle away and to secrete itself under the tortoise, which it eventually managed to do. The snake seemed much frightened, and, although he struck at the mouse frequently, and sometimes with apparent success, the mouse generally avoided the stroke with the utmost agility, and before letting go had ridden three or four times round the bandbox on the snake’s back. I imagine that the fang of a young ‘*Ringhals*’ is not sufficiently developed to penetrate the thick hair on a mouse. I have written this account to you, as the fact of the mouse having eaten the snake is antagonistic to the generally conceived idea of reptilian customs.

“The *Ringhals* left for England by the R.M.S. Hawarden Castle on the 2nd inst., and the mouse I returned to his habitat under the stump of a tree in the garden, and although I have several times

tried to catch him again, I have (unfortunately for me) been unsuccessful.—S. COWPER.’”

Mr. J. H. Leech, F.Z.S., exhibited specimens of some new Butterflies from Japan and Corea, which he was intending to describe at a future meeting of the Society, and gave some account of his expedition to those countries in quest of Lepidoptera.

A communication was read from Prof. J. H. Scott and Prof. T. J. Parker, containing a description of a Whale of the genus *Ziphius*, of which a specimen had been recently obtained near Dunedin, New Zealand.

This paper will be printed entire in the Society’s ‘Transactions.’

The following papers were read:—

1. On the Occurrence of *Scorpæna scrofa* off the South Coast of England. By FRANCIS DAY, C.I.E., F.Z.S.

[Received March 26, 1887.]

On March 21st I was fortunatae enough to secure in Cheltenham a recently stuffed specimen of *Scorpæna scrofa*, 11·2 inches in length, which had been obtained under the following circumstances. It had been captured by a trawler at Brixham at the beginning of the month, and forwarded next day to Mr. Woore, fishmonger in this town, as being a fish quite new to the local fishermen. Owing to my being away and to obviate its being spoiled, Mr. Woore had it stuffed, and in this condition I first saw it. So far as I know, this fish has not previously been obtained along our shores, and I think its occurrence ought to be recorded.

B. vii. D. $11\frac{1}{10}$. P. 19. V. $\frac{1}{5}$. A. $\frac{3}{5}$. C. 13. L. r. 46.

The specimen agrees so thoroughly with the description in Cuvier and Valenciennes’s ‘Histoire Naturelle des Poissons,’ vol. iv. p. 288, that further remarks upon this subject appear to be unnecessary. Although in the ‘Catalogue of the Fishes of the British Museum’ this species is described as having “the head entirely scaleless and smooth,” and no mention of spines exists in the description, still in the definition of the genus it is remarked that “the head is armed with spines.” Valenciennes refers to “les nombreuses épines de sa tête,” and Moreau, in his ‘Poissons de la France,’ very accurately describes the fish.

Hab. The Mediterranean and along the Atlantic shores of France as high as the Gironde and Rochelle. Moreau observed that he had never seen it from the coast of La Vendée. Common also at Madeira. It does not appear remarkable that a straggler should occur along our southern shores, but its occurrence during a very cold March would hardly have been anticipated.